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03 February 2009

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Dear Mrs Murtagh

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 02 February 2009 to look at work in planning for and implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum with particular reference to Year 7.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of thirteen lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the planning for and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 were slightly above the national average. At this early stage of the implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, it is not possible to make a firm judgement on its impact on achievement, but the progress of the students observed in lessons was good.

- Exercise books and other work also demonstrate that students are making good progress.
- The curriculum is helping students to develop very good speaking and listening skills.
- The curriculum is making a strong contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Students have very positive attitudes to

learning and respond enthusiastically to the more active and engaging lessons.

- Attendance in Year 7 has risen by over 2% this year.
- Behaviour in lessons seen during the inspection was excellent. The school's tracking indicates that behaviour in Year 7 classes has improved significantly this year.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in Year 7 is good

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Teaching of subject information, skills and understanding is thorough.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- The large majority of lessons are varied and interesting, and include opportunities for students to work in pairs and in groups. A few lessons lack variety and fail to capture students' attention; in these lessons teachers spend too long talking to the whole class and students spend too long passively listening. In some cases, teachers make too little use of open questions to provoke students' thinking and widen discussion.
- Students are clear about their targets, how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Marking is thorough and provides students with clear guidance. The school has used the new curriculum as an opportunity to develop the way in which teachers use assessment during the lesson; in many cases this is leading to better learning and more rapid progress.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the new curriculum in Year 7 is good.

- Subject departments have made good use of the opportunities provided by the new curriculum to redevelop schemes of work and teaching materials. There is some very imaginative curriculum planning within many subject areas.
- The school's specialism in science makes a strong contribution to the curriculum. The science department is an area of good practice in teaching and curriculum development. However, greater use could be made of the expertise within the department to assist in the development of the curriculum across the school.
- Much has been done to develop the way in which all subject areas contribute to the development of students' literacy and oracy skills.
- A good start has been made in planning for the development of students' personal learning and thinking skills. Much has been done to build teachers' understanding and to ensure that opportunities for students to develop skills are identified in most schemes of work and lesson plans. However, the coverage of these skills across the whole curriculum and students' development of particular skills over time are not systematically planned for or coordinated.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

The leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is good.

- The introduction of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum has been well led. Planning has been thorough and began well in advance.
- The achievement and personal development of individuals and groups of students is carefully tracked to check that the curriculum meets everyone's needs. Any changes to the curriculum are based firmly on leaders' analysis of this information.
- Senior leaders have overtly used the new curriculum as an opportunity to make teaching and learning more interesting, active and varied for students.
- The school has made good use of a range of external training and support.
- Middle leaders understand the aims of the new curriculum and are enthusiastic about the opportunities that it provides.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is good.

- The school monitors the progress of all groups very carefully to ensure that they all achieve well.
- All groups of students were seen to be making good progress in the lessons observed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that planning for the development of students' personal learning and thinking skills across the curriculum is more coordinated
- ensuring that all teachers are able to teach varied and active lessons which interest and motivate students.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the curriculum in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Chris Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector